Fire of freedom and passion

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Fire of freedom and passion

by cherrylite

Summary

Story of how Okazaki and Watari bonded and eventually developed feelings for each other. It all started back during their road trip stay in Nagoya...

Notes

HayaShigeki is implied to be canon. All characters are aged up to 18
All main cast gets mentioned throughout the fic but only tagged characters get any dialogue pieces (starting with ch2)

Red flower

Chapter Summary

> Watari decides to visit Okazaki's home and it eventually develops into discussion of Watari's feelings and insecurities

Okazaki returned to her apartment after a long and tiring day. It was the same as other days of school trip: just visiting different places of interest and sometimes attending "conferences"... Okazaki knew Nagoya like 5 fingers of her hand so it wasn't that interesting to her. After entering the apartment, she started to clean up: she always liked to keep rooms tidy. Even her workplace was always relatively clean.

Suddenly, she heard knocking on a door. No, that wasn't it. It sounded as door was about to be kicked down. It got Okazaki concerned so she looked in the door peephole. It was Watari, trying to get Okazaki's attention so she would let her in. Okazaki sighed and opened the door. Watari, like a bullet, burst in the hall and started running around before Okazaki could say anything. Well, her moment of peace was disturbed and there's nothing she could about it. Sure, Watari was a nice company, but she could use a little warning at least...

"Oh my gosh, this mask is so cool! I didn't know you were so talented, Okazaki!" - Okazaki heard muffled excited screams from her workplace. Looks like Watari already got there. Okazaki slowly walked in the room. Watari was trying on one of the masks Okazaki was making at the time, looking in the small mirror. She noticed the new presence in the room and immediately turned around and walked to Okazaki. "I can see nothing in this mask! And you wear it every day? Hooow??" - Watari whined. "I guess it's a simple matter of getting used to it. I wear this mask for at least a year".

"A year???" - Watari gasped. "I couldn't stand even an hour!". She put the mask back on the table. Okazaki then asked: "Waatari, why did you come to my apartment all of sudden? I thought everyone would go and visit Tsuno's house". Watari immediately replied: "Well, firstly, not everyone went to visit Tsuno, some just went to the hotel. Secondly, I wanted to see your home!"

Okazaki shrugged: "As you see, I'm renting an apartment and live completely alone now. I had some roommates but they moved out already. My apartment is pretty boring if anything. I bet Tsuno's house would be more... memorable". Watari shook her head: "No way! Look at your workplace, it looks so amazing! These neon lights, these paints, these brushes..."

She stopped herself and proceeded towards the kitchen. "Ok, actual reason I wanted to visit you was to watch some movies! Y'know, like a movie night! I already brought a plenty of

popcorn!" Okazaki, who was following Watari, got surprised at the suggestion. She had "Smart TV" and could watch whatever she wanted but an actual movie night? This could be interesting.

Suddenly, Watari gasped looking at the table with popcorn packs. "I forgot to buy drinks! Okazaki, do you have something? " - Watari exclaimed. "Only bottled water. I'll go buy soda then" - Okazaki said calmly, already going to the front door. Watari tried to stop her to volunteer instead but decided that it wouldn't ultimately matter in the end. They just need soda.

Okazaki returned after 10 minutes, holding 2 bottles of soda in her hands. However, when she entered the apartment, it was quiet. Too quiet. Watari wasn't in the kitchen or living room. Watari wasn't at the workplace either. Okazaki was walking around when she noticed a breeze in the living room. That's when she realized where Watari was. Okazaki went to the balcony and there she was: Watari, looking at the evening sky, fiddling a red flower in her hands and murmuring something. Okazaki went closer to hear it clearer.

"*Hayashi... Hayashi... Hayashi-"* - Watari was looking at the sky with sparkly eyes, daydreaming about her " future wife". " Ah, looks like you're still not over your crush?" - Okazaki asked calmly. Watari yelped: "Sheesh, Okazaki! You should stop sneaking on people like that! And I-". Watari was interrupted by Okazaki.

"I think you should move on, I'm pretty sure you know Hayashi and Yanagi are a couple".

"T-they're not! Where's your evidence?"

"They spend a lot of time together-"

"They're just friends!"

"They went on couple of dates-"

"Those were not dates!"

"Hayashi agreed to be Yanagi's Valentine on 14th February"

"Well, it's simply-"

"**Would you still deny it even if they kissed right in front of you?"**

"HUH??"

Watari froze in place. She always knew Okazaki could be blunt and brutally honest, but like this? She had no words: it was so insensitive, so rude... but it was the truth. The bitter truth that Watari couldn't swallow. She sighed and gripped the red flower in her hands: "I... I know I have no chance with Hayashi! But it's not so easy to just... get over your feelings! I need some time!". Okazaki didn't show much reaction: "Huh... I really do wonder why did you get crush on Hayashi in the first place. Is there any psychological reason for it?"

"What do you mean by psychological reason?! Love is love... It's not like you can just gaslight yourself into loving someone! I mean, you can but that's not the point here!" - Watari tried to wrap her head around what Okazaki said but her words seemingly fell to dead ears.

"So, do you imagine your perfect partner as someone who can protect you and with whom you can be safe?" - Okazaki asked with some persistence. "That's general characteristics, Hanano! It's not like anyone actually wants to feel unsafe with their special someone!" - Watari desperately tried to argue. Okazaki just continued her line of thought: "You want someone both particularly psychically and mentally strong, like Hayashi. Hm, could it be from the fact that your father rejected you when divorcing?"

That hit a nerve for Watari. "Hanano, this is so insensitive!! Don't just talk so non-chalantly about my family problems!" - Watari yelled. "Huh... I'm sorry, I guess. I was just trying to make a psychological portrait of you from the information I know".

Okazaki decided to change the topic of their conversation, focusing on the red flower Watari was holding in her hands. Where did she even get this one? "Azalea... Where did you get it?" - Okazaki asked. "What?" - Watari said surprised, her minds were still at the previous topic.

"You hold Azalea flower in her hands. Where did you get it?" - Okazaki repeated with no change of ton whatsoever. Watari looked at the flower she was holding and smiled: "There was a flowerbed near your apartment. It was so beautiful. So, there were like a lot of different flowers: blue, violet, white... But there was one cute and big bush of Azaleas. And they were so bright and colorful! I just thought I had to take one!" - Watari tried to describe her feelings on the subject to the best of her abilities. Watari continued: "Y'know, now that I'm thinking, that bush reminded me a lot about me... and my family".

"Interesting... So, you think this Azalea symbolizes you in a way? How so?"

"Hm, let's see..." - Watari started to think, - "Well, look at the color! It's like fire red, it's so bright it immediately sticks out of the crowd! Just like me! And also... This particular one I took... It was sticking out of the bush, like it was trying to escape, trying to grasp something it couldn't reach... I'm also like that".

Watari sighed and looked at the flower sadly. Was there any hope for it? Was there any hope for *her* to change her family situation in any way? Azalea is just gonna die eventually without realizing what it really wanted. Watari decided to throw it away so it would suffer less. Watari got closer to the fence of the balcony and was ready to lose the grip of her right hand with which she was holding Azalea.

"I don't think I can let you do that". Okazaki gripped Watari's hand so she wouldn't throw away the azalea. Watari was speechless: she couldn't even understand the whole situation and why Okazaki decided to stop her. It was just a flower and not even that rare either!

"Why do you want to throw the flower away?" - Okazaki asked not letting go of Watari's hand.

Watari didn't answer. Situation seemed too surreal for her to say anything. What Okazaki even plans to do?

"Do you think this flower would be better off lying on the road instead? Just dying by being stomped?" - Okazaki continued. "Would *you* be better off lying on the road instead?"

"What- What the hell, Okazaki?! What are you even implying here?!" - Watari quickly turned around and got off Okazaki's grip (but still holding flower in her hand). She was very angry since that particular question tipped her off. But she tried to not do anything rash since Okazaki sometimes does have hard time understanding social cues.

"Hm... Looks like my phrasing was a bit incorrect. What I meant is do you think there's no hope for you? That you're just gonna wilt eventually?"

Watari got surprised. It's like Okazaki was reading her mind bit by bit. Watari couldn't do anything but confirm what Okazaki said. She just nodded and started to leave the balcony. There was no reason to be there anymore. Okazaki followed her.

Watari felt completely crushed from that conversation and she didn't have any will to do anything. She just wanted to be alone with her thoughts for the time being. She left the flower on the table and slowly walked towards the exit door. "What about the movie night?" - Okazaki asked. Watari sighed: "I'm sorry... I'm not really in the mood right now. Don't blame yourself, it's just..I need to be alone right now. Do whatever you want with popcorn, I don't need it anymore. I guess... I'll meet you tomorrow" - Watari waved to Okazaki, turned around and left. Okazaki continued to stand in the hall for a while until she noticed the azalea Watari left.

Okazaki poured water in a graphene and put the flower there. It looked pretty nice and really complemented the empty table. Okazaki thought of how she didn't have flowers in the apartment for a really long time.

Then she opened popcorn and can of soda and moved them to the living room. Then she turned on TV and chose some "corny-ass anime" with typical superhero and incredibly cartoonish villain. Okazaki knew it was bad but it was her guilty pleasure which she watched at least 3 times. It also helped her with coming up with the ideas for random door traps for Tsuno...

Mission: Socialize

Chapter Summary

> The day after Watari and Okazaki had that conversation, the party was held. Watari noticed Okazaki being completely alone and decided to help her with getting new friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

--Day after--

A big party was held in one of the clubs, organized by their assigned teacher for this reason: "You all worked hard and deserve a break!". Everyone was in high mood and were celebrating in their fullest: some people were at the dance floor, others were split in small groups, eating snacks and just talking to each other. Hasegawa and Kamimura went outside the building since Kamimura didn't feel particularly well and needed some fresh air. Either way, everyone was having fun. Well, except Okazaki who was sitting in the corner and eating hiding her head in her coat. She didn't like parties very much and wasn't really close to anyone except Watari who was currently at the dance floor. She could start messing with Tsuno or just simply sneak out of the building (even with Kamimura and Hasegawa outside, she wouldn't be noticed) but Okazaki preferred to stick to stealing food from other people. Only Tamba noticed it but didn't complain much except "Tsk!" At least, that's what Okazaki thought at the time.

The music changed to a calmer one and Okazaki noticed a figure going right to the corner where she was siting. It was Watari, trying to catch her breath after dancing for so long. Okazaki passed a water to her and Watari drank 2 glasses in one moment. Then she sat down and noticed Okazaki's weird "set up": "Hanano, what is this?"

Okazaki looked out of her coat and said: "I'm eating" while also chewing something.Watari looked at Okazaki with a little concern but decided to not question it further. She's going to get weird answer anyway.

"Wait, don't tell me you were sitting here in the corner completely alone the whole time?"

"Yeah. What's wrong with that?" - Okazaki asked with genuine curiosity.

"You are at the party. You're supposed to have fun! Not just sit in a corner like a little weirdo!"

"I'm... not a weirdo. And I'm not really a party person, to be honest". - Okazaki replied.

"Still! Even if you don't like dancing and stuff, you can just talk to people! Even Kamimura and Hasegawa have fun despite not actually being here!"

'Yes, they totally have fun and it's not just Kamimura ranting off about how much he hates his life' Okazaki thought to herself.

"Anyway, you should find new friends. Socialize more or people gonna start think you're weirdo. And this party is a perfect opportunity to do so!" - Watari stood up with excitement and pulled Okazaki's hand.

"W-What are you doing? I never agreed to this!" - Okazaki practically cried out. She should've snucked out of the party when she had opportunity.

"Come on, it's gonna be alright! They're your classmates, after all! I'm gonna be here and intervene in the worst case scenario. Now, go, go, go!" - Watari pulled Okazaki again and then abruptly let go of her. Okazaki ended up in front Chiba and Harada chatting with each other.

'I'm not a child. I don't want to talk to people now is all. This is a bit frustrating' - Okazaki looked with big annoyance at Watari hiding behind one of the pills and showing thumbs up to Okazaki.

Okazaki turned back to Chiba and Harada who were petting Sawa. Maybe it's not the worst group to be shoved in, it'd be way worse if it was Hiroaki or Sasaki, for example. Her thoughts suddenly got interrupted by two voices:

"Hi Okazaki!" - Chiba greeted her cheerfully.

"Hello Okazaki. Um, do you need anything?" - Harada also greeted her but more unsurely.

"Hm... Nothing in particular. Just... I'd also like to hold Sawa, if it's allowed". - Okazaki tried to come up with most adequate reason possible since she couldn't just say: "Watari forced me to".

"Oh, uh, of course! Just be careful, I guess!" - Harada handed Sawa to Okazaki gently. Okazaki hoped that Sawa would not go crazy while she's holding it. It's pretty friendly tiger, but a tiger nonetheless. Okazaki started to slowly pet Sawa to not disturb it. At the same time, Chiba spoke up:

"Wow, your fur coat is so nice, Okazaki! Where did you get that one?"

"I don't remember. You can touch the coat if you want, just be careful not to ruin it. I kinda like it" - Okazaki noted.

"You sounded a lot like Nakamigawa right now."

"I have to admit, it did sound like him. He gets kinda paranoid about people ruining his suits" - Harada agreed with Chiba. Suddenly, very distant "Shut up!" was heard from the other end of the room. How did Hiroaki hear their conversation from this far away, Okazaki wondered.

"What was that? Was that really Hiroaki just now?" - Harada was caught a bit off guard by a yell. "Are we sure he said that to our conversation? Maybe it was about something else?" - Chiba wondered. "Somehow... I really doubt that". All three of them looked at the direction Hiroaki was possibly standing at. And he was indeed turned to them. Chiba and Harada started laughing but Okazaki didn't, though she admittedly did find the situation funny.

"Hey Okazaki... why are you always so distant from us?" - Chiba changed her tone to a more serious one. Okazaki didn't expect this question, especially from Chiba.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"You barely talk to all of us, except Watari. You act you aren't our classmate at all most of the time". - Chiba continued. "You always wear your mask and hide your emotions. Literally". Chiba was very serious, her childish tone disappeared completely. Okazaki didn't know how to answer this question. She didn't hate any of her classmates but she still didn't want to talk much with them.

"But maybe you could also be our friend!" - Chiba returned to her usual cheerful state in a moment.

"H-huh??" - Okazaki got surprised.

"We could become a quartet instead of trio!"

"I'm not sure I really like-". Okazaki bit her tongue. If she finishes this sentence, who knows what Watari would do? She probably still listens in...

" I mean, I wouldn't mind that... You seem like an interesting person" - Harada added, although a bit unsure.

"Alright. But I need to go now. It was nice talking to you two, I guess". - Okazaki handed Sawa back to Harada and turned around to find Watari.

Watari immediately looked out of her "hiding spot" and joined Okazaki: "You see? It was this easy and you didn't fumble up at all! Now you'll have some more friends!"

"I was just lucky to be shoved into this group. Chiba and Harada are mostly friendly-"

"Hey, don't underestimate yourself! You did a plenty good job there!" - Watari smiled and showed high-five. Okazaki reluctantly also gave a high-five, tho she didn't understand the point.

Suddenly, their chit-chat got interrupted by someone else. It was Hayashi.

"Hello, Hayashi." - Okazaki was first to greet her. Watari lowered her head and became really sad: she still didn't move on from conversation yesterday.

"Yo. Hey, is everything alright, Watari?" - Hayashi asked with a bit of concern in her voice.

"Pfft, I'm totally fine! You don't have to worry about me!" - Hayashi tried to awkwardly laugh it off but she wasn't that great of an actress.

"Ok then. I just need to talk to you real quick"

"Hm, what is it?"

"Someone's been stealing food from the table and from Tamba directly. I thought she was just paranoid but I checked myself: at least half the plates are empty. Even with 16 of us, there's no way so much food would be gone in such short amount of time. Who do you think the thief is?"

Hayashi finished her monologue and both of them suddenly became silent, piercing Okazaki with cold stares of suspicion.

"W-why are you looking at me like that?" - Okazaki asked surprised. There's no way she was caught so easily.

"Because it's fucking obvious you did it! You were spotted by Tamba!" - Hayashi said with accusative tone.

"I thought she didn't care much."

" Didn't care much? Are you kidding me?! Is this really Tamba you're talking about?"

At that time, Watari just made a facepalm and shook her head in frustration and disappointment whispering "Hanano...". But Okazaki decided to not back down, even if it was obvious there's nothing she can do anymore.

" You have no evidence!"

"Open up your coat. I bet you hid most of the stuff in there" - Mai continued with her accusations.

"I-I refuse!"

Watari decided that it's better to intervene right here, right now and stop this charade: "Hanano, open up your coat".

Okazaki shrugged and started to take out bunch of snacks out of her coat one by one. By the time she was done, half of the food table was already filled with snacks. Hayashi and Watari both stared, too shocked to say anything.

"What the hell, Hanano?! How did you even steal this much? And why? You didn't even eat it!" - Watari said being completely stumbled.

"I thought it was funny to see Tamba's reaction on food suddenly 'disappearing'-"

"Funny?!" - Mai almost yelled.

"Oh my God, Hayashi, I'm so so sorry for what happened! This won't repeat again!" - Watari pleaded and swiftly pushed Okazaki to do the same.

"Ouch- I'm sorry too... I guess".

"You better be. You won't get away so easily next time. Consider it a mercy cuz I'm in good mood today" - Hayashi turned around and went to talk to Tamba.

Watari sighed in disappointment and decided that it's better to leave now. She took Okazaki by the arm and proceeded towards the exit:

"And everything went so good with Chiba and Harada! Did you just have to fumble it up?!"

"Well, I stole those snacks *before* you made me talk to them. But maybe I did steal a few more during that moment-"

"Why did you do this?! Now not only everyone considers you a weirdo, but they are also gonna be cautious around you!"

They reached the exit and went outside, leaving the building and heading in a direction of hotel where everyone was supposed to be. Watari continued her lecture:

"We really owe it to Tamba now. We have to compensate with something. Do you even know what she likes?"

"From what I've seen, she still follows her diet, even now. Probably some candied fruits would be nice."

"Good idea Hanano. But you really have to promise to not steal food from the parties. People are supposed to have fun there!"

"I... promise".

They turned around the corner and disappeared out of Kamimura and Hasegawa's sights who accidentally overheard their conversation.

"Imagine being so bored you actually steal food from other people at the party" - Kamimura smirked cynically.

"Yes, it is... weird" - Hasegawa nodded and they both decided to go inside and learn more about the situation at hand.

Chapter End Notes

Ch1 was cringe? Forget it, this chapter was pain-inducing to write
Weak before peak ig

Watari's nightmare

Chapter Summary

Week later, Watari decides to organize sleepover with Okazaki and Tamba to make amends for what happened at the party. Then Watari sees a nightmare which makes her realize if she can trust Okazaki at all...

Chapter Notes

ATTENTION! If you somehow haven't watched Trial 3 of Tetro Danganronpa Pink, this chapter has spoilers for it. I tried to not mention gore too much but be careful. Konkonkon...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Konkonkonkonkon... KONkonkonkonkonkonkon!

An ominous laugh rang in the trial grounds. Okazaki took her mask off, revealing her face for the first time. She was smirking evily as if everything was going according to her plan.

Watari was just standing completely paralyzed. What is going on? Where is she? Why Okazaki is soaked in blood and sounds so villainous? Why where's only 10 of all her classmates? And what the hell is that loud music?!

"...You're standing in the presence of INSURMOUNTABLE GREATNESS! The foxes call to a midnight moon.The streak of white in a starless & desolate sky. THE PHANTOM THIEF OF NAGOYA! <.....> Your first time meeting true and honest supervillain? Hah!"

Watari tried to get a better look at the place but everything seemed blurry. It looked like a dream. No, not a dream. A nightmare, a horrible nightmare. She needs to find a way to wake up and quickly!

"...Everyone's complaining about their stuff getting stolen when this is some of the simplest, easiest, most-beginner level stealing I've ever had to do! Are-are you serious? You just leave stuff on your desks! It's... tragic! You're tragic!"

'What is she even talking about? What is this Phantom Thief of Nagoya?!'- Watari thought to herself. What was even happening with her friend she thought she knew well enough to at least trust her and be by her side?

"S-So Kazutoshi.." (Hasegawa)

"Died for nothing! That's about right!"

Kamimura... died? What? Then, those 6 absent are... No, no way! Why this nightmare can't end already?

"-Seeing the life leave Tsuno Manami's eyes is something I would have paid for! Hah!"

Did Okazaki... just confess to killing two people? What the fuck, what the fuck... Watari was looking down at the podium, tears appearing in her eyes. She could barely listen to that awful monologue but some lines still hit her like an arrow. And this blasting music too...

"So, I wanted to spice things up a little: wrote the note, left the saw in Wada's room, hid the key in his desk- Pfffthaha, I didn't think any of that crap was gonna work, not a chance, but I just wanted to make things a bit more fun, and what's more fun than a whole second mystery?!"

Watari didn't know what to do. She was crying, being unable to process the whole thing. She wanted to say something, she wanted to say a lot of things and ask so many questions but she could only plead: "Shut up!... Shut up!"

Her words practically fell to dead ears. Okazaki was just about to continue her rant on how her murder plan was oh-so good-

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Watari jumped up screaming. It was a nightmare after all. She was trying to catch her breath, cold sweat covered her face and her heart was beating abnormally fast. 'What was that?' - it was the only thing on Watari's minds at the current moment. She looked at the alarm: 2:30 AM, sounded about right. Then she slowly looked around the room: it was a small hotel room with the table at the center and 2 beds. Okazaki was sleeping on the other end of the room, Tamba was lying on the floor near Okazaki's bed. Watari sighed with relief and tried to recollect what happened before the nightmare occurred. She invited Okazaki and Tamba to the sleepover, they drank tea, played a game of truth or dare, gossiped a bit and went to sleep.

Watari decided that she still needs to get her mind off that nightmare and drink glass of water. She stood up and quietly took one of the glasses from the table. Then she proceeded to very carefully walk on tiptoe to not wake up anyone and not step on Tamba by accident. After that, Watari turned on the light in the bathroom and opened the door. She turned water tap and filled the glass, looking at herself in the mirror: she looked horrible: messed up hair and tired face. As she took a sip, she noticed someone's silhouette with the corner of her right eye.

"Waatari, why are you awake this late at night?"

Watari got so scared she spilled all the water from her mouth onto the mirror. "Okazaki, don't scare me like that!" - Watari said coughing and wiping off the water she spilled.

"I thought I made my presence clear enough"

"I didn't hear your footsteps at all!" - Watari turned to Okazaki who was peeking out of the door opening.

"I guess my stealth skills are way better than yours"

"Hey, I tried my best, y'know"

Watari put the glass of water and left the bathroom. Okazaki followed after her: "Anyway, why were you awake this late?"

"I-I had an awful nightmare... The whole thing was weird but the way everyone was speaking... This felt too real..." Watari sighed.

"Now I'm curious. Can you tell me more about this nightmare of yours?"

Watari hesitated. After all, nightmare involved Okazaki confessing to killing 2 people and not just 2 random people: their classmates, their friends... Should Okazaki know something like this?

"Waatari?" - Okazaki's voice returned Watari back to reality.

"Um... It was really weird. We were like in some room with podiums and our classmates were there but only 10 of them including us. I don't know what happened with 4 of them but... Kamimura and Tsuno..." - Watari closed her mouth with her hand, it was really disturbing to remember.

"What's with Kamimura and Tsuno?" - Okazaki leaned her head a bit. This was just becoming more and more interesting to her.

"They... They died! And you were there, covered in blood, telling how you killed them without any hesitation! Something about Phantom Thief of Nagoya or whatever..." - Watari suddenly exclaimed. She didn't plan to say it all out loud like that...

Okazaki got shocked. Of course, she wouldn't try to kill Kamimura or Tsuno but Phantom Thief of Nagoya, the secret identity... It was revealed just like that. Okazaki had to either lie or admit it all... But then their rivalry with Tsuno would end for good.

"Look, I would never do such a thing. I wouldn't murder anyone. And I have no clue who Phantom Thief of Nagoya even is".

Suddenly, Watari started to cry seemingly out of nowhere.

"Why are you crying?" - Okazaki asked with concern and surprise in her voice.

"I really don't know you... *Sniff* I always thought I could trust you but... I'm not sure at all now!"

"I don't understand how I broke your trust in any way".

"Okazaki from that nightmare... Maybe it was ridiculous, maybe it could never happen to us in real life, but... She sounded realistic! What if... what if what I saw in nightmare was the *real* you?"

"I'm sure I didn't kill anyone. You can knock on Kamimura and Tsuno's doors and see that they're perfectly fine. Except Kamimura would probably grumble because you woke him up for no reason-"

Watari suddenly put her head on Okazaki's shoulder and continued crying. Okazaki was slightly uncomfortable with this but she couldn't do anything.

"It's not about that! The way you were talking like we were all some kind of worms compared to you... What if it's real you? You did steal food just to piss off Tamba at the party...What if you *are* some villainous thief? What if our friendship is just another step in your evil plan?" - Watari continued crying, practically sobbing her eyes out.

"Okay, tell me more about myself in the nightmare. Like, how exactly was I talking?"

"Well... *sniff*, you were laughing a lot like this: " Konkonkonkon!". You called us dimwits and idiots for not being able to solve mystery on our own. You also mentioned some "Phantom Thief of Nagoya" and Tsuno being your nemesis... Uh, I think you were also pretty inserious about the whole thing. That's probably everything"

Okazaki and Watari both became silent for a moment, the only sound in the entire room was Watari's crying until suddenly-

"Konkonkon" - Okazaki laughed quietly but it was enough for Watari to stop crying and yelped: "Hanano, what was that for?!" She stepped back from Okazaki.

"I was just trying to check how the laugh you described would actually sound".

"Did you really had to check it while I was crying on your shoulder?! That was kinda inappropriate moment!"

"What moment would you consider appropriate then?"

Watari went quiet and bit her lip. Yeah, it'd seem inappropriate no matter what.

"Either way, I don't look down on all of you. And I do care about you, Watari". - Okazaki tried her to reassure her and not to accidentally confirm her supervillain persona.

"If you really care about me, prove it".

"Prove how? I think it's beyond doubt whole nightmare is baseless and ridiculous".

"Take off your mask" - Watari suddenly said with full seriousness.

Okazaki gasped and took a step back, almost stepping on Tamba's arm.

"I'm afraid I can't do that"

"So you can't prove that you care about me"

"It's not like that! I really prefer to keep my face hidden- What other reason do you have for me to take off my mask?"

Watari stumbled and started to think. What other reason she could provide besides simple curiosity? If Okazaki even sleeps with the mask on, there's no way she'll take it off so easily... Aha!

"Because I know how your face actually looks! I saw it in the nightmare!" - Watari tried to bluff her way out.

"Then tell me how it looked"

"Easy! First of all, you had paw earring in your left ear! Super adorable one, if you ask me! Second, your eyes were light gray and had small stars. Finally, one of your teeth was sticking out. Honestly, it reminded me of foxes... These're main details I could remember. So, if I'm wrong, take off your mask and show me your actual face!" - Watari smirked confidently.

Okazaki hesitated. Watari completely cornered her. Lie that her face doesn't look like that - take off your mask, admit the truth - take off your mask. Looks like it was a test of trust which had the only one way to pass. And she decided to trust Watari.

"Fine. Just don't tell a soul about that" - Okazaki sighed and slowly took off the mask.

"Is this what you wanted to see?"

Watari at first didn't know how to react: she didn't believe that her scheme worked so easily. But she was also captivated by Okazaki's face, particularly by her eyes. Despite them being gray color, they shined so bright they could lit the darkest room like diamonds. And those stars looked like those on the night sky... Watari just couldn't understand why such treasure was hidden from everyone.

"Now this is proof enough, right?" - Okazaki was the one who broke the silence.

"Y-yes, it's just like in that nightmare... But your expression now is less... evil, I guess"

"Now, can you describe how Tsuno and Kamimura were murdered in that nightmare? It's just pretty interesting topic for me". - Okazaki frowned and put her hands where her pockets were supposed to be. 'It's pretty unusual to see Okazaki's expressions actually change' - Watari thought to herself.

"Let's see... Tsuno in the nightmare was killed by the door trap, as far as I recall and Kamimura... Oh god..."

"Was it gruesome then?"

"Too gruesome to just say it out loud. Besides, it sounds weird to speak of them like that"

Suddenly, they both heard Tamba groaning and slowly waking up, looks like their conversation disturbed her sleep. Okazaki quickly put her mask back on.

"Uh... Guys? Do you know how late it is?? Why aren't you sleeping?" - Tamba yawned, not being fully awake.

"That's a good question! We actually wanted to summon a ghost!" - Watari quickly steered away the topic. Tamba didn't need to know about her nightmare.

"H-huh?"

"A ghost? Are you serious?" - Tamba stood up from the floor.

"What's a sleepover without summoning some vengeful spirit of a girl who died in a bathroom? Come on, I'll find tutorial in the internet real quick" - Watari went to her bag to search for phone.

Okazaki and Tamba stayed where they were.

"What's gotten into her?" - Tamba asked.

"I don't know. Looks like she came up with this idea on the spot"

"So,how long were you awake?"

"Probably around 10 minutes or so. I just heard Watari opening a water tap in the bathroom"

"Huh".

Okazaki turned around and added: " Summoning a ghost sounds like a fun idea, on the other hand. Are you with us, Tamba?"

"Ugh, fine. It won't be my fault if you two fall asleep tomorrow on excursion though!" - Tamba groaned.

In the end, they tried to summon the spirit of "Daruma-san",almost burned towels and whole bathroom as a result, didn't see a thing and went to sleep around 4 AM.

Chapter End Notes

How to ruin cool concept by corny writing:
Daruma-san: ghost of the girl in Japanese folklore who died by slipping on the bathroom floor

Tour, coffee, Hasegawa

Chapter Summary

Day later, entire group goes on excursion in Hamamatsu's castle. But our trio decides to explore on the their own

Chapter Notes

Mi amore, mi amore
Espresso Machiatto por favore, por favore (/lyr)
All locations should be geographically accurate

The tour bus stopped at the specific bus station for their hotel and everyone slowly left, chatting to each other and went towards Hamamatsu's castle where they were supposed to have an excursion.

However, Watari, Tamba and Okazaki stayed near the bus, deciding whatever they shall do.

"*Yawn*.. I'm so sleepy! Those bus chairs were so comfy I accidentally fell asleep!" - Watari yawned and stretched her arms trying to fully wake up.

"I told you staying up late was a bad idea!" - Tamba exclaimed. She was the one who woke up Okazaki and Watari this morning.

"I don't regret anything. It was fun, especially the moment when Watari almost set the entire bathroom ablaze." - Okazaki chuckled a bit.

"I already apologized. I just accidentally dropped the candle!"

"A-anyway, what do we do now? We're like, falling behind already" - Tamba looked around, being unsure.

"Hm... what if we make our own tour?" - Okazaki suggested.

"Huh?"

"Good idea, Hanano! That's exactly what I was going to suggest!" - Watari snapped her fingers and smiled.

"I dunno... What if we get lost or something?"

"You're going to lead us out. Your hometown is Hamamatsu, correct?" - Okazaki tilted her head to the right.

"Um, I mean... Yeah, but I visited this castle ages ago! I practically don't remember anything!" - Tamba crossed her arms and pouted. She now regretted devoting her life to gymnastics more than ever. She wished she could go and visit some places more.

"Don't worry, we won't get lost either way! We'll just walk near the castle anyway! We'll return to the rest of the group if we need to. Now, come on!" - Watari was leading everyone with her hand.

Tamba and Okazaki followed right after her. Despite reconcilation and "bribery with candied fruits", Tamba was still on guard around Okazaki. Who knows, maybe she'll steal her money this time?

They entered the parking lot specifically for cars and motorcycles. There weren't that many cars since it was still morning. However, Okazaki had spotted a peculiar car.

"Hm, never saw a pink car before. And it looks pretty expensive" - Okazaki noted as she was inspecting the car and peeking into its interior through one of the windows.

"Pink car? I wish I had one like that!" - Tamba whined.

"Oh yeah, Tamba, you failed driving exam 13 times, right?" - Watari responded.

"Don't remind me, jeez..."

"While pink is bright and peculiar color, I'd rather tune car in white and orange. Those are my 2 favorite colors".

"Oh, do you plan to buy car in the future, Hanano?" - Watari said curiously.

"I... do, yes" - Okazaki hesitated. It was a lie after all. No way she'll buy something that she can steal easily. Of course she didn't want to repeat that story with van but buying a car seemed like a big unnecessary trouble. Maybe she'd steal some old car no one uses and customize it so it wouldn't be recognizable anymore? It sounded like a good plan in her head.

Suddenly, Watari gasped and pointed her finger forward: "Guys, look at that, there's Starbucks! Who wants some coffee~?"

"I certainly wouldn't mind a drink. Depends on how expensive is it and how secure the place is-"

"No stealing, Hanano, nuh uh!" - Watari shook her head.

"If you think I have money to actually buy something good there, you'd very disappointed: I don't".

"But you did buy candied fruits, right?" - Tamba argued.

Okazaki didn't reply.

"You *did buy* candied fruits, right?" - Tamba repeated, making accent on words "did buy".

Okazaki didn't reply again.

"Oh my god, Hanano, I told you to not steal anything for now! We try to reconcile with Tamba after you stole food from her during the party! Don't just go and mess up the whole thing!" - Watari was outraged.

"I stole not from her, right? So I don't see a problem here"

"The problem is that shoplifting is a crime!"

"No one noticed me, I guarantee I won't get arrested"

Watari made a facepalm. Not this conversation again...

"I'll pay the part for you if necessary, kay? Um, what about you, Tamba? Want some drink?"

Tamba went silent and was clearly saddened about something.

"T-Tamba? Is everything okay?"

"Yes... It's just... Remember that I'm on a strict diet, right? And I don't think my mom will allow me anything but bottled water at this point" - Tamba sighed heavily.

"Is your mom here?" - Okazaki suddenly asked.

"What? What do you mean?"

”Your mom is not here right now, she can't control you. You can buy whatever you want" - Okazaki suggested what seemed to Tamba a wild, outrageous idea.

"You don't understand! When I hang out with my friends and buy some food or drink, I have to send receipt to my mom so she'd approve it!"

"Who says you *should* send receipt to your mom? Just pretend you bought that bottled water while you yourself enjoy some milkshake or whatever you love".

"I have to agree with Okazaki. Your mom shouldn't control your every move!"

"I wish she wouldn't! But gymnastics career... It's my everything! If I even think about quitting or not fully committing to the routine... God..." - Tamba looked down and closed her mouth with her hand.

"Tamba... You don't have to live up to someone else's expectations. This is your life and only you can decide what's best for you" - Watari put her hand on Tamba's shoulder, trying to reassure her.

"I don't know any other life! I'm probably just a failure in anything else. My parents know what's best for me, that's what they always say, at least".

"You don't know until you try! How can you be so confident that you're only good in gymnastics when you didn't try anythng else?"

"You're probably right. But..."

"Just embrace freedom". - Okazaki said.

"Sometimes, I'm jealous of you, Okazaki. You're definitely not a good person but you have the most freedom out of all of us. You live alone, you can plan your day however you like!"

"That's right! God, I wish I could spend a day like Okazaki! Total freedom!" - Watari agreed with Tamba.

"Uh-" Okazaki hesitated. She doubted that Watari and Tamba would enjoy shoplifting, stalking and many other things she does.

"Anyway, I think we can pull the scheme with bottled water just fine. Now order to your heart wishes, Tamba!" -

"Alright!"

They've entered Starbucks. It was relatively small but their menu had enough differentiating to not complain at all. Watari ordered cold coffee, Tamba ordered espresso macchiato. Okazaki... Well she was the one who bought bottled water and plain bagel. But she had a certain plan in her minds.

They left the building when Watari pulled mobile phone out of her pockets.

"Let's make a selfie together! Tamba, Okazaki, come here!" - Watari stretched her right arm with the phone. Okazaki and Tamba stood right behind her.

"And now, smile and say 'cheese!'"

"Wait, how Okazaki can even smile? She's, like, in the mask" - Tamba replied.

"If you want to take me off my mask just for this selfie, I won't do that. Sorry"

"It's alright Tamba. Not like selfie would be bad cuz of that" - Watari shortly turned her head to Tamba before focusing on her phone.

"1, 2,3... Cheese!" - Watari clicked on camera button at least thrice for better measure.

"Mhm, it's perfect! Thank you for partially showing your mouth, Okazaki!" - Watari said as she tapping on her phone, sending photo to Tamba and Okazaki.

"Don't mention it. This is the last time I'm doing it".

"So you do something only if Watari says so... Noted" - Tamba remarked.

"What- What are you implying?" - Okazaki fumbled.

"Nothing. It was a joke, jeez"

"Anyway, where are we going next?" - Watari tried to steer conversation on the other topic.

"I know there are the ruins just in couple minutes of walking. Let's go there. I'll try to remember the way" - Tamba suggested.

They shouldn't have trusted Tamba's navigation skills. But what matters the most is that it was super fun. They chatted about whatever while Okazaki drank both Watari's iced latte and Tamba's espresso without them noticing. What she can do? Stealing is in her blood.

They eventually reached the well after what it seemed like hours (it was 20 minutes).

"Wow, these ruins are kinda cool actually! Let's make some photos here!" - Watari pulled out her mobile phone again.

"Who's going first?"

"Oh, oh, me! I have this totally cool idea! Let me just get over there-" - Tamba raised her hand and went over to ruins where she started climbing.

"Wow." - Okazaki gasped but somehow still keeping her neutral tone.

"I- What the hell, Tamba?! What are you doing all the way up there?" - Watari just stood shocked.

"This is the only time I can be fully free, without my parents restrictions! Might enjoy it to the fullest!" - Tamba looked down to Watari and Tamba. She was standing on the roof of the main building.

"Not like this! You can fall and seriously injure yourself! Freedom is not about complete lack of rules!"

Okazaki snapped a photo of Tamba on the roof.

"Hey Okazaki, do another photo please! I want to make a cool pose!"

Tamba crossed her hands and looked in the front, imagining herself a savior of the town. Okazaki snapped another photo.

"Um, sorry girls- WHY IS TAMBA ON THE ROOF??" - three of them heard someone's voice in the back. It was... Hasegawa.

"Ha-Hasegawa? Oh woah!" - Tamba got so surprised she almost fell from the roof.

"Tamba!!" - Watari cried out. She was ready to help Tamba herself.

"What do you need, Haasegawa?" - Okazaki asked.

"Sasaki asked me to find you three. You need to return back to the group"

All three of them gave the coldest and most disappointing glare they could ever give.

"Why-why are you staring at me like that? Did I say something wrong?"

"Oh, it's nothing. We were just having way more fun without that stupid excursion! Not like we're really going to get lost!" - Tamba ranted as she was climbing down.

"Are you sure?" - Hasegawa argued. "Um, what I mean is Sasaki is concerned about group staying together! It's an excursion for everyone!" - Hasegawa added to make his previous remark look better.

"Fiiiiiiine. We'll return back now. Don't worry, you can go, Hasegawa" - Watari assured him.

"O-ok..." - Hasegawa turned around and went back.

"Aw man and we only were getting started!" - Tamba looked disappointed as a kid who didn't get their candy.

"We can have fun even during excursion. Who said Sasaki is good guard?" - Okazaki whispered.

"Yeah, we'll have our fun no matter what, they will see!" - Watari giggled.

Three girls whispered something to each other and followed Hasegawa, their faces had the most mischievous smile you can imagine.

'Maybe it was not the, uh, thing that I've expected to happen. Bonding with Okazaki?! No way in hell! But it was really, really fun too! I felt I could be myself for once! Watari is so cool, like, she is definitely my friend now. I also feel like Okazaki and Watari have way closer bond than just simple friendship. That's probably my inner shipper talking but.... Oh my god, they'd be so cute! As for excursion, sneaking behind Sasaki was super funny! She always had such serious face and reaction, like: "This isn't time for games!". God, I can't even describe my thoughts fully. No wait, I know just a perfect song lyrics. Here:

"What the hell just happeeeneeed?

No clue, but I liked it!"

This is it for today. 20xx/07/06. '

Tamba stopped writing, closed the diary and put it back in the drawer.

Monopoliya

Chapter Summary

Watari decided to invite Okazaki to the game of monopoly. Little did they know how it would turn out...

Chapter Notes

I changed Okazaki's backstory details, don't throw tomatoes at me

Watari left her hotel room and went towards Okazaki's room, holding big box in her hands. Watari rung the doorbell. Seconds later, door opened.

"Ah, it's you, Watari. What do you need?" - Okazaki peeked out of the door and let Watari in.

"You're not busy now?" - Watari asked her

"No. Why you ask?"

"Know 'Monopoliya'? Let's play one session!" - Watari smiled.

"Sure, why not. What's the edition we're playing?" - Okazaki shrugged.

"Hm, classic. You know the rules, right? The goal here is to make other players go bankrupt!"

"Sounds fun. Lay out the field" - Okazaki let Watari in the room, clearing the floor for it.

"I think this is totally gonna be fun. Sometimes, me and my siblings play it. I, of course, win most of the time." - Watari lifted her head in pride like it was her the greatest achievement in her entire life.

"Let's see if you can defeat me. Trust me, I won't go easy on you" - Okazaki chuckled.

"Wait, why we treat Monopoliya like it's a fighting game? Its gameplay can be rather long, sometimes even boring and tedious" - Watari said as she was sorting out the money and properties cards.

"So, you want to make it more fun, riiight? I can do that" - there was something devious in Okazaki's voice.

"Well... sure, go ahead. But I also wanted to talk about stuff while we play"

Watari and Okazaki sorted out things together and were prepared to play.

"What chip do you choose? I kind of wanna pick a thim" - Watari placed it on the "Start" field.

"Then I pick a hat"

Watari decided to go first. She picked up the two dices and shook them in her hands before rolling. She got 10.

"Woo, the luck is on my side already! I'm sure I'll totally win this one" - She excitedly started to move her chip to "Property" field.

"I wouldn't be so excited considering it's only the beginning. Everything can change" - Okazaki picked up the dices and rolled 4.

After couple of turns, Watari started speaking again:

"Hey, Okazaki. About next academic year, are you gonna be a rare visitor again?"

"Hm- Most likely. I'm really not into studying"

"But it's so boring without you there! I bet you would make lectures a lot more fun" - Watari whined.

Watari paused and rolled her dice again. It was a property, she bought it and she put her money in the bank.

"Wait, I have an idea! Maybe we can make unofficial staff! I sure Sasaki wouldn't mind. We can take one of the empty classes" - Watari lit up with excitement.

"Sounds interesting. But I guess we need more members than just two". - Okazaki shrugged.

"Hm.... Let's see... Tamba is a perfect candidate! I would never consider her before yesterday but I totally changed my mind now! She's actually really cool!"

"Tamba certainly has some vibes. She can actually fit our wavelength, if you get what I mean" - Okazaki picked up some money for crossing the "Start" field again and also took from someone else.

"You're right! But I think climbing on the roof of one of the buildings yesterday was a biiit too far" - Watari rolled the dice.

"I don't know. It seemed kinda epic to me. She looked like some sort of superhero. Or supervillain, whichever one you prefer"

"But honestly, I didn't expect for her parents to be this strict to her. This must suck a lot. Like, everyone gets to make their own choices and live their own lives!"

"Totally agree with you. I'm buying Electricity,by the way"- Okazaki got the card from the box.

"If I could, I'd take Tamba to live with me. And you too. We'd be like three besties living together!" - Watari giggled like a little girl.

"Hm... I wonder how your parents allowed you to go so far away from your home. Shouldn't they be against it, since you can't help them and all?" - Okazaki tilted her head.

"Nah... As soon as they learnt I'd have full scholarship, they were fine with that. I have more questions how you managed to enter the academy"

".....Do you really wanna know?"

"Don't tell me you cheated on the entrance exams, Hanano! You don't even attend half the classes!" - Watari sighed in frustration.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Anyway, it's your turn now, Watari. You didn't do anything for 5 minutes"

"Ah, right! Thanks for reminding me!" - Watari hastily picked up dices.

"1,2,3,4, 5... and 6! Woo, this one is sure expensive property! I bet I can buy it- WHAT?!" - Watari stared at her money in shock. There was practically nothing left. She bought several properties and lost a bunch of her money but there was something wrong. There was something else at play.

"What's wrong? Don't have enough money?" - Okazaki asked calmly. But there was a difference in her tone. It was more... devious.

'So, this is what you meant by making the game more interesting, huh, Hanano... Stealing my money! Blasphemy! If this is how you want to play, then fine!' - Watari was encouraged more than ever to beat Okazaki but she didn't have a clue how. How can you defeat a thief? Watari got deep in a thought until she had an idea.

'If I manage for Okazaki to return my money via making her pay the rent for my properties her chip steps on, it'd be a way to victory! For this, I just need to find a way to enact that plan!' - Watari bit her lip in excitement and let Okazaki do the turn.

After that, there was a fight but not in common understanding of the word. It was a mind game between Watari trying to get her money back and Okazaki who continued to steal while Watari wasn't looking. Eventually, Okazaki claimed victory by taking 90% of Watari's money. Watari had to admit that she's bankrupt and give up.

"Told you everything can change!" - Okazaki said proudly.

"How... It's impossible... I tried to make you pay the rent as much as possible..." - Watari cried out in defeat.

"Wait, you what?" - Okazaki smiled under her mask. "You really tried to outplay me? A thief? You tried to outplay me by making me return you stolen money? Do you realize how stupid this sounds? Hahahhaha, I can't even fathom what made you think it was an actually good plan!?" - Okazaki burst into laugh.

"Fine, fine, maybe it wasn't such a good plan after all. Just don't rub it in my face, alright?" - Watari pouted.

"Sorry, it was... hahahha.... too funny. No one tried to stop me like that before"

"You didn't have to steal to win, y'know?"

"No, I didn't care about winning. I just wanted to make game more interesting, as you wanted. And it was indeed funny, right?" - Okazaki replied.

"Yeah, you're right. It was. But now I wonder, why do you steal so much?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" - Okazaki was confused. No one asked the question like that before.

"Well, you always steal or cheat or do something else illegal. Why? Is there a 'psychological reason' for that?" - Watari practically quoted one of Okazaki speech figures.

Okazaki paused for a minute. What she should even answer?

"I guess I had a rough time. Force of habit, per se" - Okazaki knew she was half lying. Watari didn't need to know about Phantom Thief of Nagoya.

"Oooh, now I'm curious! You never told me anything about your past! I really wanna know how you lived back then!"

"No, you really don't want to know that. I barely told anyone about my past. It's not something you particularly need"

"But everyone here has some sort of sad backstory! You must have one too! I wonder, if it's going to be wilder than Kamimura..." - Watari put her hand on her chin.

Okazaki was silent. Should she tell it Watari? Not that she distrusts her but... Her past better stay in the past.

"Hey... you know that I was kidding, right... if you don't want to talk about it, that's fine. I will try to support you" - Watari reassured Okazaki.

"I... I'm not really sure if you want to hear it. It's kind of dark..." - Okazaki sighed.

"It doesn't matter. If you want to share it, go ahead. I will listen to you"

Okazaki took off her mask. She looked really sad and dejected. She started:

"My mom was, no she still is, a scientist. She always wanted to discover something and did it by... human experiments. I was supposed to be a blood donor and nothing more than that... But fate had other plans for me. I was born not with the blood type she wanted, plus I had some other... psychical differences. To say my mom was disappointed is to say nothing at all. I wasn't the thing that she wanted. I couldn't be her perfect guinea pig..."

"Okazaki, I- I'm so sorry." - Watari mumbled.

"Nothing to apologize for. Anyway, there was someone else who genuinely cared about me. He was like a father figure. It was my mother's colleague, I think. My mom always said he was "sadist" and "evil" but he was the only one who tried to save me. And I kinda thought: "If evil is the only thing that saves me, maybe I should become evil too?". But either way, I ran away from my mom's laboratory at age of 13 with couple of friends. Then we became roommates but a lot of things happened and now I live alone"

Okazaki put her mask back on.
"Sorry if this backstory wasn't as tragic as Kamimura's. It's probably disappointing for you in a sense"

Watari was almost crying. She didn't know, she didn't realize... Watari hugged Okazaki.

"Huh? What are you doing-" - Okazaki got surprised.

"I'm so sorry for you, Hanano. If only I knew... I'm just giving you what your mom never did"

Okazaki felt pretty awkward. No one hugged her like that. It felt somewhat nice and warm.

"From now on, I'm gonna make you receive as much hugs as you want! You deserve it, girl!" - Watari declared.

"What? There's no need to-"

"Don't lie, Okazaki. You definitely need some hugs. Maybe I should hug you every time we meet. Like super besties!" - Watari giggled.

"Really there's no need to-" - Okazaki was flabbergasted.

"That's decided! You're not gonna feel abandoned anymore. For you see, evil is not the only thing that can save you" - Watari winked and started to pack up Monopoliya. "Today is the last day before we go back home again. I just wanted to spend with as much fun as possible. Hope you liked our little session" - Watari smiled and left the room.

Okazaki tried to process the whole thing. 'Evil is not the only thing that can save you', huh... Bold of Watari to think she can save Okazaki. But that's the story for another time...

Phone Call

Chapter Summary

Watari calls Okazaki after a very hard and pressuring day

Chapter Notes

Sorry for late update! I was hit with lack of inspiration

Watari hides in the bathroom and calls Okazaki. She was very sad and the only thing that she wanted right now is to talk to one of her friends.

'Why am I calling her though? If anything, I should be calling someone from my fire dancing team. Hanano is not for moral support and cheering you up' - Watari questioned her decision but she already heard the beeps from her phone. No turning back.

Okazaki picked up the call after couple of seconds.

"Hello, Waatari. What do you need?" - Okazaki asked curiously.

"Hanano... Can I just tell you about my day and how I'm doing right now?" - Watari said in a drooping voice. She sat down on the floor.

"You sound... sad. But I feel like you shouldn't be calling *me*. I give bad moral support. Hama or Tsuno suit better for that purpose. Even Hiroaki could give better advice-"

"No way in hell I'm ever calling Hiroaki for moral support! But I mean, I didn't call for you in order to support me"

"Then why?"

"I just wanted to talk to my friend. You can listen, right? That's all I'm going to ask of you"

"I think I can do that. What happened?"

Watari made a deep sigh and hesitated for a moment. She could be found out by her family at any moment.

"Remember when you asked me how my family allowed me to go so far away for studying? Well, my mom is really mad right now. Really, really mad"

"I thought you answered to me back then that everything was fine" - Okazaki argued.

"Because I thought so too! That with me going away for studies, everything is gonna be fine!" - Watari cried out.

"Can you just describe why your mom is mad at you?"

"Um, alright... During that road trip, uh... I left a lot of my responsibilities at home to my mom so I could just hang out more with you guys and.... Of course she didn't like that. I mean, I promised her that I'm gonna help her on holidays... and see where I am now?"

"Hm, but wasn't the road trip kind of mandatory? Well, technically it wasn't but it was really, really recommended to join it. I wouldn't go if it wasn't almost mandatory. And maybe if you weren't there" - Okazaki smiled under her mask.

"I know and I tried explaining it to my mom too! But she doesn't want to listen! Remember how I said I'd try to return as soon as we're allowed to enter the dormitories and we'd go shopping together? That won't happen... I think I'm not even allowed to leave until actual studying starts!"

Okazaki was silent.

"Right now, I'm just a housemaid who works 24 hours a day without a break to pay her "ignorance" and "selfishness" because I decided to go on a trip for 3 weeks!!" - Watari exclaimed then looked around. She's still in the hiding, she hoped no one heard that.

"You're 18, right? They can't control you like that. If you don't like something, just go and leave"

"I can't do it! It's not as simple as you think! I don't... live like you when you do whatever you want because you don't have anyone controlling you, not even societal norms and morales! I... still care a lot about my family. I know how hard it is for my mom to take care of my younger siblings, she counts on me! I feel... guilty, actually. Of course I want to be more free but my mom can't take this burden alone too! I sort of understand her"

"....Did you seriously just say that? Do you seriously treat me like a street criminal, completely devoid of any empathy? Maybe my mother never cared about me and maybe I am a bit of street criminal, often lacking empathy but... It's not like I don't understand your struggles!" - Okazaki felt a bit angry at Watari's claims

"You do, you really do! You say it's just so easy to get out and run away... But I can't abandon my family! In the end, they truly care about me"

"So, what's the point of having this conversation anyway? Not like you're going to listen to me anyway" - Okazaki shrugged and dropped the call

"Wait, what? Okazaki!" - Watari called her out but it was too late. She did something wrong, didn't she?

Okazaki left her phone on the table. Being emotional wasn't a part of her but she felt like she just couldn't continue anymore. Maybe she should take a break from things. She didn't have energy to create super evil door trap for Tsuno so Okazaki decided to return to her workplace and continue working on of the masks she's been making.

Watari just stared at her phone for a while. What did just happen? She couldn't wrap her head around it. Was she wrong, was Okazaki wrong? Watari couldn't understand. She was seeking distraction from all things and a simple talk with her friend but she didn't get it. She felt mentally exhausted. Suddenly, she heard her mom calling and had to get to her chores. Not like she had a choice.

Few hours have passed since that dramatic phone call. Okazaki was painting her mask, when phone suddenly rung again. It was Watari. Okazaki was hesitant to pick it up: what she needs, especially this late? Is it for what she said few hours ago?

At the same time, after finishing what seemed like a big pile of dishes to wash, Watari took her jacket and left the house. She needed some space alone when surely no one would intervene. It was already night and the wind was pretty chilling. She called Okazaki in hope that the latter would pick up.

"Watari? What do you need, it's so late at night" - Okazaki asked.

"Hanano, thank goodness you picked the phone, I thought you wouldn't-

I just want to apologize for the stuff I've said. I was under a lot of stress and was really inconsiderate of your feelings. I swear I'll try to not do this again"

"I'm sorry too then... I think? Maybe I shouldn't have just dropped the call like that"

"It's... fine. I'm glad we resolved the matter so quickly. I don't want to lose a friend because of petty grudges and stuff!" - Watari pouted.

"Not like I'd genuinely stop talking to you because of this anyway. I was just a bit angry and needed to cool my head off, that's all"

"Alright then! I feel like I was too down in the dumps but there's always a glimpse of hope! Maybe I can ask my mom really nicely to let me go a bit earlier so we could visit something together, how about it?"

"Sure, I'm all in. But what exactly should we visit?"

"Maybe that reserve! I know Harada comes a bit early this year along with Chiba. I'm sure we can arrange something. Besides, there's an amazing cafe nearby! How about we go in the

reserve and then buy ice cream or something" - Watari said excitingly.

"Seems like a great plan to me. But you need to negotiate first with your mom, I presume?"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine. I'll manage to do that. I bet she's not going to be that mad a month after!"

"Okay. I think I'm going to go sleep now. Good night I guess?" - Okazaki stood up from her chair.

"Good night, Hanano!" - Watari dropped the call.

She looked at the night sky. It was so clear tonight, moon was full and stars shined bright like little diamonds. Now stars to Watari forever reminded her of Okazaki's eyes, so captivating and endearing... Watari wished Okazaki was there right now with her and they would just stargaze together, not caring about their daily life problems or anything else in the world. It would be just them and the night sky.

Okazaki also decided to go the balcony. Nagoya had the same sight of stars and full moon. Okazaki just stood there, looking. You can rarely see sky being like that. Okazaki kinda wished Watari was also there...

After stargazing for 5 minutes, wind reminded Watari to return back home. She wrapped around her jacket and went back. She now felt like so much was ahead of her.

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